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Aruba's ONLY English newspaper

New COVID-19 cases in U.S. soar to highest levels on record

By KATHLEEN FOODY
Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — More than a year after the vaccine was rolled out, new cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. have soared to their highest level on record at over 265,000 per day on average, a surge driven largely by the highly contagious omicron variant.

New cases per day have more than doubled over the past two weeks, eclipsing the old mark of 250,000, set in mid-January, according to data kept by Johns Hopkins University.

The fast-spreading mutant version of the virus has cast a pall over Christmas and New Year's, forcing communities to scale back or call off their festivities just weeks after it seemed as if Americans were about to enjoy an almost normal holiday season. Thousands of flights have been canceled amid staffing shortages blamed on the virus.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious-disease expert, said Wednesday that there is no need to cancel small home gatherings among vaccinated and boosted family and friends.

But "if your plans are to go to a 40- to 50-person New Year's Eve party with all the bells and whistles and everybody hugging and kissing and wishing each other a happy new year, I would strongly recommend that this year we not do that," he said.

Continued on Page 2



RECORD HIGHS

People are tested for COVID-19, at a walk-up testing site run by Nomi Health, Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2021, in downtown Miami.

Associated Press

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New COVID-19 cases in U.S. soar to highest levels on record

Continued from Front

The threat of omicron and the desire to spend the holidays with friends and loved ones have spurred many Americans to get tested for COVID-19.

Aravindh Shankar, 24, flew to San Jose, California, on Christmas from West Lafayette, Indiana, to be with family. Though he felt fine, he decided to get tested Wednesday just to play it safe, since he had been on an airplane.

He and his family spent almost an entire day searching for a testing appointment for him before he went to a site in a parking lot next to the San Jose airport. "It was actually surprisingly hard," Shankar said about trying to find a test. "Some people have it harder for sure."

The picture is grim elsewhere around the world, especially in Europe, with World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus saying he is worried about omicron combining with the



Pam Hetherly fills a syringe with COVID-19 vaccine at a clinic at the Augusta Armory, Dec. 21, 2021, in Augusta, Maine.

Associated Press

delta variant to produce a "tsunami" of cases. That, he said, will put "immense pressure on exhausted health workers and health systems on the brink of collapse."

The number of Americans now in the hospital with COVID-19 is running at around 60,000, or about half the figure seen in January, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

While hospitalizations sometimes lag behind cases, the hospital figures may reflect both the protection conferred by the vaccine

and the possibility that omicron is not making people as sick as previous versions. COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. have climbed over the past two weeks from an average of 1,200 per day to around 1,500.

Public health experts will be closely watching the numbers in the coming week for indications of the vaccines' effectiveness in preventing serious illness, keeping people out of the hospital and relieving strain on exhausted health care workers, said Bob Bednarczyk, a professor of global health

and epidemiology at Emory University.

CDC data already suggests that the unvaccinated are hospitalized at much higher rates than those who have gotten inoculated, even if the effectiveness of the shots decreases over time, he said.

"If we're able to weather this surge with hopefully minimal disruptions to the overall health care system, that is a place where vaccines are really showing their worth," Bednarczyk said.

It's highly unlikely that hospitalization numbers will ever rise to their previous peak, said Amesh Adalja, senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security at the Bloomberg School Public Health. Vaccines and treatments developed since last year have made it easier to curb the spread of the virus and minimize serious effects among people with breakthrough infections.

"It's going to take some time for people to get attuned to the fact that cas-

es don't matter the same way they did in the past," Adalja said. "We have a lot of defense against it."

But even with fewer people hospitalized compared with past surges, the virus can wreak havoc on hospitals and health care workers, he added.

"In a way, those hospitalizations are worse because they're all preventable," he said.

Several European countries, including France, Greece, Britain and Spain, also reported record case counts this week, prompting a ban on music at New Year's celebrations in Greece and a renewed push to encourage vaccination by French authorities.

WHO reported that new COVID-19 cases worldwide increased 11% last week from the week before, with nearly 4.99 million recorded Dec. 20-26. But the U.N. health agency also noted a decline in cases in South Africa, where omicron was first detected just over a month ago. □

More cruise ships under CDC investigation due to COVID cases



Carnival Cruise Line's Carnival Horizon cruise ship is shown docked at PortMiami, Friday, April 9, 2021, in Miami.

Associated Press

By **ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON**
The Associated Press
MIAMI (AP) — The U.S. Cen-

ters for Disease Control and Prevention is investigating more cruise ships due to

new cases of COVID-19 as the omicron variant drives extremely high infection levels in the industry hub of Florida. The CDC said 88 vessels are now either under investigation or observation, but it did not specify how many COVID-19 cases have been reported. Four other vessels are also being monitored by the CDC as well. Florida hit a new record for daily cases on Tuesday with 46,900 new cases in a day. Since Christmas, the state's 7-day average of daily cases has surpassed previous records set during last summer's surge, rising to 29,400 infections.

Coronavirus hospitalizations in the state have also risen from about 1,200 patients two weeks ago to about 3,400 on Wednesday. But that is still less than one-fifth the number of hospitalizations reported in late August due to the delta wave. Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal is calling for the CDC and cruise lines to again halt cruise travel, six months after the industry mounted its comeback.

"Our warnings have proved sadly prescient and continuously compelling. Time for CDC and cruise lines to protect consumers, again pause — docking their

ships," the Connecticut senator posted on Twitter.

Cruise lines have not announced any plans to halt cruising. And the CDC did not say it would adopt any changes, adding it still had plans to allow for the expiration of a set of rules that cruises must follow to sail during the pandemic. The regulation, called a conditional sailing order, is scheduled to expire on Jan. 15 to become a voluntary program. "CDC acknowledges that it is not possible for cruising to be a zero-risk activity," CDC spokesperson Jasmine Reed said in an emailed statement. □

Biden, Putin to hold call over stepped up security demands

By AAMER MADHANI

Associated Press

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del.

(AP) — President Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin will speak Thursday as the Russian leader has stepped up his demands for security guarantees in Eastern Europe while maintaining an unsettling buildup of troops near Russia's border with Ukraine.

The two leaders will discuss "a range of topics, including upcoming diplomatic engagements," National Security Council spokeswoman Emily Horne said in a statement announcing the call.

The talks come as the U.S. and Western allies have watched the massing of Russian forces along the border, growing to an estimated 100,000 and fueling fears that Moscow is preparing to further invade Ukraine.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke on Wednesday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. State Department spokesman Ned Price said Blinken "reiterated the United States' unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity in the face of Russia's military buildup on Ukraine's borders."

Price said the two discussed efforts to peacefully



President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, arrive to meet at the 'Villa la Grange', June 16, 2021, in Geneva, Switzerland.

resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine and upcoming diplomatic engagements with Russia.

Putin said earlier this week he would ponder a slew of options if the West fails to meet his push for security guarantees precluding NATO's expansion to Ukraine.

Earlier this month, Moscow submitted draft security documents demanding that NATO deny membership to Ukraine and other former Soviet countries and roll back its military deployments in Central and Eastern Europe.

The U.S. and its allies have refused to offer Russia the kind of guarantees on Ukraine that Putin wants, citing NATO's principle that membership is open to any qualifying country. They agreed, however, to hold talks with Russia next month to discuss its concerns.

The U.S. and Russia are to hold high-level talks on Jan. 10. Moscow and NATO representatives are expected to meet that same week as well as Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which includes the United States.

In Thursday's call, which was requested by the Russians, Biden is expected to stress to Putin that the U.S. is united with its allies but will demonstrate a willingness to engage in "principled diplomacy" with Russia, according to a senior administration official who briefed reporters on the upcoming call. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity. The two leaders held a video call earlier this month. The official added that the White House sees the leader-to-leader engagement as important as the administration looks to find a way

Associated Press

beyond this "moment of crisis" over growing worries of a further Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In 2014, Russian troops marched into the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea and seized the territory from Ukraine. Russia's annexation of Crimea — one of the darker moments for former President Barack Obama on the international stage — looms large as Biden looks to contain the current smoldering crisis.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan has made clear in public comments that the administration is ready to discuss Moscow's concerns about NATO in talks with Russian officials, but emphasized that Washington is committed to the "principle of nothing about you without you" in shaping policy that affects European allies.

"We're approaching the broader question of diplomacy with Russia from the point of view that ... meaningful progress at the negotiating table, of course, will have to take place in a context of de-escalation rather than escalation," Sullivan said at an event hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations earlier this month. He added "that it's very difficult to see agreements getting consummated if we're continuing to see an escalatory cycle." □

NYC Mayor-elect Eric Adams to take oath at Times Square

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Eric Adams will take his oath of office in the wee hours of New Year's Day to become only the second Black mayor of the nation's largest city.

New York's mayor-elect announced on Wednesday that he would hold his swearing-in ceremony at Times Square on Saturday, shortly after midnight, right after the traditional ball drop and amid thousands of New Year's Eve revelers. "I am deeply humbled to officially take the oath of office at this iconic occa-

sion, and to participate in the transfer of leadership that is a cornerstone of our democracy," the former New York police captain said in a statement.

Adams will become the city's 110th mayor and helm a city of 8.8 million people who had been led for the past eight years by fellow Democrat Bill de Blasio.

"Times Square has long been synonymous with the New Year — a place of excitement, renewal, and hope for the future," Adams said. "These are the same themes that animat-

ed my campaign and will inform my mayoralty, as I prepare to lead the city out of this challenging period." The pandemic cast uncertainty over his inauguration earlier this month, as infection rates surged.

He had hoped to hold his inauguration in at Kings Theater in his home borough of Brooklyn, but scuttled those plans because of the quickly spreading omicron variant. In recent days, New York has posted record numbers of infections.

A spokesperson said inauguration plans are still



Mayor-elect Eric Adams speaks at a news conference at the Queensbridge houses in Long Island City, Queens on Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021, in New York.

Associated Press

pending.

De Blasio took his first oath of office at his Brooklyn home a couple minutes after the stroke of midnight on New Year's Day in 2014.

It was followed later by a public ceremony on the steps of City Hall.

The choice of Times Square might be an unusual one, but not unprecedented. □

New Mexico tribes concerned about plan to power nuclear lab

By S. MONTOYA BRYAN

Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP)

— New Mexico Indigenous leaders are concerned about a proposed multimillion-dollar transmission line that would cross what they consider sacred lands.

The transmission line planned by the U.S. government would bring more electricity to Los Alamos National Laboratory as it looks to power ongoing operations and future missions at the northern New Mexico complex that include manufacturing key components for the nation's nuclear arsenal.

The proposed transmission line would stretch more than 12 miles (19 kilometers), crossing national forest land in an area known as the Caja del Rio and spanning the Rio Grande at White Rock Canyon. New structural towers would need to be built on both sides of the canyon.

The All Pueblo Council of Governors — which represents 20 pueblos in New Mexico and Texas — recently adopted a resolution to support the preservation of the Caja del Rio. The organization says the area has a dense concentration of petroglyphs, ancestral homes, ceremonial kivas, roads, irrigation structures and other cultural re-



This undated file photo shows the Los Alamos National Laboratory in Los Alamos, N.M. New Mexico Indigenous leaders are concerned about a proposed multimillion-dollar transmission line that would cross what they consider sacred lands.

sources.

The tribes say longstanding mismanagement by the federal government has resulted in desecration to sacred sites on the Caja del Rio.

The U.S. Energy Department's National Nuclear Security Administration announced in April that it would be working with federal land managers to assess the project's potential environmental effects. But pueblo leaders claim there has not been adequate tribal consultation on the proposed project.

All Pueblo Council of Governors Chairman Wilfred Herrera submitted a letter to the Santa Fe National Forest on Dec. 17, requesting that forest officials comply with consultation requirements.

Herrera, a former governor of Laguna Pueblo, said preservation of the Caja del Rio's sacred landscape is a collective priority for the council as it works to protect ancestral homelands around the region. He said Caja del Rio is home to pueblo ancestors and spirits.

"We encourage the federal government to understand that to fully engage with the pueblos, we need your commitment and cooperation, especially during this time of year marked by transition and rest. APCG stands ready to support decision-making that protects pueblo cultural resources in perpetuity," he said in a statement issued last week. Federal officials have said they will try to avoid known biological, recreational, cultural and historical resources, such as El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro Na-

Associated Press

tional Historic Trail. Another goal would be minimizing visibility of the transmission line from residential areas.

The project — which could cost up to \$300 million — calls for new overhead poles with an average span of 800 feet (244 meters), access roads for construction and maintenance and staging areas where materials can be stored.

Part of the line would be built along an existing utility corridor, but a new path would have to be cut through forest land to reach an electrical substation.

Environmentalists, residents and others already have voiced concerns about potential effects, saying the area encompasses wide Indigenous landscapes and is a scenic gateway to northern New Mexico.

The area has seen an increase in outdoor recreational use and it serves as a migration corridor for wildlife.

The Los Alamos Study Group, a watchdog group that has been critical of Los Alamos lab's expansion plans, has said the lack of an overall analysis of the cumulative effects that plutonium core production and more weapons work could have on the surrounding communities is another concern. □



A trail of footprints lead from the parking lot to the water as freshly-fallen snow blankets Frenchman's Bar Regional Park in Vancouver, Wash., on Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2021.

Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — A thaw-out is coming for frozen Seattle and Portland, Oregon, but not before another round of snow that could com-

-pound problems for a region more accustomed to winter rain than arctic blasts.

More snow and rain fell on

Another round of snow before thaw comes to frigid Northwest

California on Wednesday, causing travel disruptions on mountain routes and raising the risk of debris flows from wildfire burn scars.

And in Nevada the governor plans to declare a state of emergency due to snow and storm conditions affecting travel in the Lake Tahoe area of northern Nevada.

Forecasters say parts of western Washington could see up to 3 inches (7.6 centimeters) of snow Thursday and northwestern Oregon could see a similar amount. The normally temperate part of the Pacific Northwest has shivered with tem-

peratures hitting the single digits in some areas this week after extreme cold air from Canada's Fraser River Valley blew in on Sunday. Snow and ice has made travel treacherous in some parts, forced closures and travel delays and prompted people to take shelter in emergency warming centers.

Temperatures could rise above freezing in Seattle Thursday and be even warmer in Portland, before airflow from the Pacific blows in on the weekend and causes the mercury to rise to more seasonable highs in the 40s Fahrenheit

(4.4 Celsius).

State officials in Oregon have declared an emergency. In Multnomah County — home to Portland — about a half dozen weather shelters were open this week. A similar number of shelters were opened in Seattle's King County, which also declared an emergency.

Seattle leaders said city shelters will remain open through the new year.

Winter weather and a return to pre-pandemic levels of traffic have resulted in hundreds of accidents on Oregon roads this holiday season. □

How democracy was dismantled in Hong Kong in 2021

By ZEN SOO and
HUIZHONG WU

Associated Press
HONG KONG (AP) —

As the days of 2021 dwindled, so did any remaining traces of democracy in Hong Kong. On Wednesday, a vocal pro-democracy media outlet — one of the last openly critical voices in the city — closed after a police raid. Earlier in December, the opposition was shut out from elections under a new law that puts all candidates to a loyalty test. And monuments commemorating the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 were taken down.

Again and again throughout the year, the city's authorities and the central government in Beijing stamped out nearly everything the pro-democracy movement had stood for. Activists fled abroad or were locked up under the draconian National Security Law imposed on the city 18 months ago. Unions and other independent organizations closed down.

Where once Hong Kong allowed "open opposition and questioning of the government's core policies and legitimacy ... any meaningful policy debates will now take place among



University students clean the "Pillar of Shame" statue, a memorial for those killed in the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, at the University of Hong Kong, June 4, 2019.

Associated Press

a small circle of government loyalists," said Kurt Tong, partner at The Asia Group and former U.S. consul general in Hong Kong and Macao.

The days when the former British colony was considered a bastion of freedom fade in memory. Returned to China in 1997, Hong Kong has endured an overhaul of its political system and a crackdown on political dissent. Authorities sought to suppress antigovernment sentiment that led to months of political strife

in 1919.

The most recent example was Wednesday's raid by Hong Kong police on the online pro-democracy news outlet Stand News. Seven people were arrested among them two current and former editors and four former board members, including a popular singer, Denise Ho for alleged sedition under a colonial-era ordinance. The outlet announced that afternoon that it would halt operations.

Stand News is the second

media outlet to shut down after being targeted by Hong Kong authorities. The Apple Daily newspaper closed earlier in 2021 after authorities raided its offices for a second time and froze millions in assets.

"Democracy has been under a sustained assault for well over a year in Hong Kong," said Luke de Pulford, a coordinator for the London-based Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, a group of legislators from democratic countries focused on relations with

China. "No democracy can function without a free press." "If no critical information is able to be published about the administration in Hong Kong or in China, then what last vestiges of democracy there were, I think we have to say, have been snuffed out."

In a string of tweets, Hong Kong activist Nathan Law called upon the world to "publish about Hong Kong ... (and) about the brave journalists who risk so much." Law, who fled to London after the security law was implemented, said he feared "a domino effect" that would lead other outlets to close.

Little remains of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement.

More than 100 pro-democracy figures and others have been arrested under the security law, which penalizes actions seen as separatist or subverting the Hong Kong or Chinese governments.

That includes 47 people charged with subversion in February over their roles in an unofficial primary election held in 2020 to determine the best candidates to field in planned legislative elections. □

Tusk says hacking marks crisis of democracy in Poland

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Donald Tusk, the leader of Poland's main opposition party, called Tuesday for the creation of a parliamentary commission to investigate surveillance after reports that powerful spyware was used against three people associated with the political opposition.

"This is an unprecedented thing in our history. This is the biggest and deepest crisis of democracy after 1989," said Tusk, who served as Poland's prime minister from 2007-2014 and president of the European Council from 2014-2019.

He said that his party would apply for the establishment of a commission of inquiry in the Sejm, the lower

house of parliament, to examine surveillance with Pegasus, spyware which is made by the NSO Group of

Israel and sold only to government agencies.

The ruling Law and Justice party has a majority in the



Donald Tusk, the leader of Poland's largest opposition party, Civic Platform, speaks to people joining a demonstration after the Polish parliament approved a bill that is widely viewed as an attack on media freedom, in Warsaw, Poland, Sunday Dec. 19, 2021.

Associated Press

parliament and it wasn't immediately clear if Tusk would succeed in his bid. He argued that it was in the interest of all political forces in Poland to clarify the situation, saying he believed that nobody wants to be eavesdropped on with impunity. The hacking of three people with Pegasus was reported recently after a joint investigation by The Associated Press and Citizen Lab, a cyber watchdog at the University of Toronto.

The hacking targeted Krzysztof Brejza, an opposition senator, at a time that he was the party's election campaign chief of staff in 2019; Roman Giertych, a lawyer who has defended Tusk and several other op-

position figures in sensitive cases; and Ewa Wrzosek, a prosecutor who is fighting for the independence of prosecutors as the ruling right-wing party seeks to impose political control over all branches of the judiciary.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki on Tuesday reiterated his accusation that the reports were "fake news." He said he had no knowledge of any surveillance but also suggested that if there had been any, it wouldn't necessarily have been the work of Polish intelligence services. He said there were other security services in the world, some of who are "not entirely friendly toward Poland" and "act very ruthlessly." □

Israel strikes Gaza after gunfire wounds civilian near fence

By **ILAN BEN ZION**
Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — An Israeli and three Palestinians were wounded on Wednesday in the first exchange of fire in months on the Gaza frontier. The violence came as Israel announced measures aimed at improving living conditions in the occupied West Bank after a rare meeting of top officials.

Israel has announced a number of measures in recent months it says are aimed at easing tensions, but they have had little visible impact on the ground, where attacks by both Israeli settlers and Palestinians are on the rise. There have been no peace talks in more than a decade.

The Israeli military said a civilian near the security fence was lightly wounded by gunfire from Gaza, and that it responded with tank fire at multiple military positions manned by the Hamas militant group, which has ruled the territory since 2007. The Gaza Health Ministry said three Palestinians were wound-



Israeli soldiers deploy on the Israel and Gaza border, Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2021.

Associated Press

ed, without saying if they were civilians or fighters. Earlier, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz approved a series of measures aimed at improving relations with the Palestinians after hosting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at his home in Israel late Tuesday. It was the first time Abbas met an Israeli official inside

the country since 2010. The two discussed security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which administers pockets of the occupied West Bank. Gantz's office said he approved "confidence-building measures," including the transfer of tax payments to the Palestinian

Authority, the authorization of hundreds of permits for Palestinian merchants and VIPs, and approving residency status for thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel collects hundreds of millions of dollars of taxes on behalf of the PA as part of the interim peace agreements signed in the 1990s.

The tax transfers are a key source of funding for the cash-strapped Palestinians, but Israel has withheld funds over the PA's payment of stipends to thousands of families that have had relatives killed, wounded or imprisoned in the conflict. Israel says the payments incentivize terrorism, while the Palestinians say they provide crucial support to needy families.

Israel approved residency for some 9,500 Palestinians. Israel controls the Palestinian population registry, and over the years its policies have left an estimated tens of thousands of Palestinians without legal status, severely limiting their freedom of movement, even within the occupied territories. Israel granted legal status to some 4,000 Palestinians in October.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is opposed to Palestinian statehood. His government has shown no interest in reviving peace talks but has said it wants to reduce tensions by improving living conditions in the West Bank. □

Russia, Belarus to hold joint war games early next year

By **VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV**
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that Russia and Belarus will hold joint war games early next year.

Putin welcomed Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's proposal to hold another round of military drills, saying that they could be held in February or March. Speaking during a meeting with Lukashenko in St. Petersburg, he added that military officials will coordinate details.

Putin's announcement comes amid a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine that raised Western fears of an invasion. Some officials in Ukraine have voiced concern that Rus-

sia may attack the country from Belarusian territory. Russia has denied having plans to attack its neighbor, but urged the U.S. and its allies to provide guarantees that NATO doesn't expand to Ukraine or deploy its weapons there — demands the West has rejected.

Russia and Belarus have a union agreement envisaging close political, economic and military ties, and Moscow has staunchly backed Lukashenko amid Western pressure. That pressure intensified after a brutal crackdown on domestic protests fueled by Lukashenko's reelection to a sixth term in an August 2020 vote that the opposition and the West say was rigged.

Tensions have escalated

further since the summer over the arrival of thousands of migrants and refugees on Belarus' border with EU member Poland. The EU has accused Lukashenko of retaliating for

its sanctions by using desperate asylum-seekers as pawns and tricking them into trying to enter Poland. In a show of support for Lukashenko, Russia conducted massive war games

with Belarus in September that involved 200,000 troops. In recent week, Moscow has repeatedly sent its nuclear capable bombers on patrol over Belarus in recent weeks.

On Wednesday, Russian and Belarusian fighter jets jointly patrolled Belarus' air space.

Last month, Lukashenko said that Belarus would be ready to host Russian nuclear weapons.

The Belarusian leader hasn't elaborated on what kind of Russian atomic weapons Belarus would be willing to accommodate, but noted that the ex-Soviet nation has carefully preserved the necessary military infrastructure dating back to the time of the USSR. □



Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko listens to Russian President Vladimir Putin during their meeting at Konstantin Palace in Strelna, outside St. Petersburg, Russia, Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2021.

Associated Press



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Severe Brazil flooding spreads in Bahia and beyond

By DÉBORA ÁLVARES
Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — A total of 116 cities in the northeastern Brazilian state of Bahia were in a state of emergency because of flooding on Tuesday due to heavy rains that have been pounding the region since the end of November.

Cities in at least five other states in Brazil's north and southeast have also been flooded in recent days.

In Bahia, flooding has affected more than 470,000 people. In at least 50 cities, water surged into homes and businesses, and people were forced to abandon their belongings. Official data from the state government say 34,163 people have been made homeless and almost 43,000 are displaced.

There have been a total of 21 deaths and 358 people injured since the beginning of the month.

This is the heaviest period of rainfall for Bahia in the last 32 years, according to the website of the National Center for Monitoring and Alerts of Natural Disasters, a government agency. In southern Bahia, it rained

more than five times the normal amount for this time of the year.

In an interview with local radio stations Tuesday morning, Bahia Gov. Rui Costa compared the situation to a "bombardment." He also said that coronavirus vaccines were lost in the floods of some cities.

"Some municipal health offices and medicine depots were completely under water," he said.

On Tuesday, the population of at least four municipalities in Bahia received warnings to leave their homes because of the increased flow of the Pardo River due to the opening of the Machado Mineiro dam's sluice gates in neighboring Minas Gerais state, according to the state government's advisory office.

Bahia's Civil Defense superintendent, Col. Miguel Filho, told The Associated Press that there are still flooded and isolated cities, and rains are still ongoing.

"Our first response is to help, then to shelter, to care for the population in the shelters by giving humanitarian aid, with sheets, blankets, food," he said.

He added that at least five dams in Bahia are at risk of bursting. Bridges and federal and state roads in the state were destroyed and have been provisionally rebuilt to allow food and other items to be brought to people in need.

"We still don't have a complete list of all the damage caused, the amount of structures that will need to be replaced," Gov. Costa said. "It isn't possible to stipulate a timeframe for recovery, because we don't have that dimension. We're guaranteeing accessibility, the detour, the temporary structure so that people can come and go."

The above-average rainfall is due to the La Nina atmospheric phenomenon, which increases precipitation in some areas of Brazil, including Bahia, the government's science ministry said in a statement last week.

Carlos Nobre, a prominent climatologist, explained to the Associated Press that the intensity of rains observed in Bahia are due to global warming. "We have to expect that these kinds of phenomena become



Residents clean out their flooded homes in Itapetinga, Bahia state, Brazil, Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2021.

Associated Press

more and more common. It's how the planet responds. The evaporation of the oceans is greater and, with more water vapor in the atmosphere, there are more conditions for more intense rains, as we saw in Europe and China months ago," said the expert, who also mentioned other climatic phenomena that are becoming more intense and frequent, such as droughts, hurricanes and fires.

The federal government has authorized emergency spending totaling 80 million reais (\$14.2 million) for Bahia alone. Additional funds

will be directed to other regions also affected by the rains in recent weeks, and which are still suffering the consequences.

In Tocantins state, which is adjacent to Bahia in Brazil's northern region, 22 municipalities were affected by the rains by early Tuesday afternoon. The executive director of the state's civil defense authority, Maj. Alex Matos, told the AP this number is expected to grow in the coming hours.

"We're predicting an increase in the volume of the Araguaia River, which will fill the Tocantins River even more," he said. □



People gather as victims from a collapsed gold mine are buried on Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2021 in Kordofan, Sudan. The defunct mine collapsed earlier this week, killing several people.

Associated Press

By SAMY MAGDY
Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Sudanese authorities said Wednesday rescue workers retrieved at least 31 bodies from a col-

lapsed gold mine in West Kordofan province.

The country's state-run mining company said workers and villagers were still searching the Darsaya

Sudan officials: 31 bodies retrieved from collapsed mine

mine for more bodies or possible survivors. The mine is located in the Fuja village, around 700 kilometers (435 miles) south of the capital of Khartoum.

The defunct mine collapsed earlier this week, killing at least 38 people, the company said Tuesday. It posted images on Facebook showing villagers gathering at the site as at least two dredgers worked to find possible survivors and bodies.

The Sudanese Mineral Re-

sources Limited Company said the mine was not functional but local miners returned to work there after security forces guarding the site left the area.

Collapses are common in Sudan's gold mines, where safety standards are not widely in effect. Sudan is a major gold producer with numerous mines scattered across the country.

The industry, however, suffered from years of mismanagement and corruption.

The transitional government has begun regulating the industry during the past two years.

In nearby North Darfur province, an unidentified armed group late Tuesday attacked and looted a warehouse for the World Food Program in the provincial capital of el-Fasher, said Khardiata Lo Ndiaye, U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Sudan. Local authorities in North Darfur imposed a curfew across the province starting Wednesday. □



EAGLE BEACH — Alberto Perret Gentil is the VP International Operations for the Pering Group, a 70 year old real estate development company with 20 years already in Aruba and four exclusive projects under their belt, all with beautiful ocean views and great amenities: Oceania Residences, Blue, Azure Beach Residences and Harbour House.

We catch up with Gentil inspecting the final details on the construction of The Villas at Azure Beach Residences.

We hear construction prices are increasing. What is your take?

"Construction costs have increased in the last year close to 28% for various reasons. Mainly factories closed worldwide due to Covid and caused a disruption in the supply chain with port capacity constraints in China among other places. The increase in materials and labor; steel prices through the roof due to lower production, trade wars,

Canada not exporting wood to the US, less labor available given the subsidies and more restriction in immigration and a very long process etcetera.

Also because of higher demand for goods as people stayed home during the pandemic without going out and spending on entertainment/restaurants and thus have more disposable income to buy stuff. Just to give you an idea; a container from China now costs \$22,000 vs \$5,500 previously. And on top, import duties in Aruba include the (increased) freight cost in its calculation (CIF value)."

Are these costs reflected in the condominium and house sales prices?

"Not yet but will sooner than later. After a market analysis of construction costs and behavior of condominium prices in the Caribbean and the US it is clear to me sales prices will increase shortly. Why?"

Time to invest: Premium condominium and house prices in Aruba are going up

Historically prices in Aruba have been 15% lower than Brickell-Miami; now they are 40% lower, and that gap will eventually close. In South Florida there are many factors for this price hike; people moving from NYC and California, low interest rates, better climate, the trend of a flexible workplace with the possibilities opened by the likes of Zoom and Google Meet, Blackstone and others, private equity funds buying residential real estate, higher construction costs, Latin Americans moving in driven away from socialist/communist regimes and so on.

And many of these factors should and will affect Aruba real estate prices as well. Workation and the trend of flexible workplaces is certainly one of them more so with 14 daily flights from/to the US. Aruba is safe, has the best infrastructure in the Caribbean and a much better climate and beaches than for example South Florida. By the way, not many people know this, but Aruba has the best internet in the Caribbean.

- Covid pretty much under control.
- A lot of outdoor space to roam around and with a great and sunny weather.
- Construction costs are already 25%-30% higher and sales prices have not adjusted (yet).
- Resale of Inventory by Venezuelans that bought as a weekend getaway eager to sell as they emigrated given the political circumstances will be reduced in this coming winter season.
- Very few oceanfront lands left for new condo developments and a moratorium for new condos in place. A simple equation of supply and demand."

What are you doing about it?

"Unfortunately for us we have very little inventory left for sale but will certainly increase prices as other developers are already doing. Pre- Covid prices are history.

We see another clear trend on longer stays, a high demand for premium houses and villas that are selling like crazy as people want to remain private (only one left at The Villas – Azure Beach Residences). Also, for townhouses with private pools, ground floor units and Pent Houses with the possibility of turning one room into an office. Contrary to my previous belief I even think there is room for oceanfront multi-million-dollar houses. Build them and those super rich will come. In the case of Harbour House we created a Co-Working space with all the services that has been a hit among buyers as even though they want to work from afar in their dream destination they want to socialize, have a good coffee and a quiet place to work away from the family running around in their condo."

Any final advice?

"Hurry up!! Look for experienced developers with a good track record. Take advantage of the low interest rates and remember that investing in real estate is all about location, location, location; stay close to the Ocean."

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Aruba to me..... Christmas Edition

ORANJESTAD — You are here for Christmas or New Year and we would like to portrait you! Send a Christmas and Happy New Year greeting to your loved ones, friends or colleagues back home.

Complete the sentence: Holiday Greeting from Merry Aruba to

Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish this between December 22nd and 31st.

Isn't that a special way to show your loved ones that even though you are far apart you are still close at heart everyday.

Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed



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For today we have a lovely story from **Philip Ellerin MD** from Lynnfield MA and a holiday greeting from Donny Feldman and Ron Rubin.

Philip Ellerin, MD, wrote:

"Last week, while enjoying a nice drink and watching a beautiful sunset on my veranda at the Costa Linda Resort, I began to hear the sound of a melodious saxophone coming from the Water's Edge, our famous restaurant that sits on the water's edge. For the next hour or two I was mesmerized by a string of tunes that were so enchanting I had to call the restaurant to see if it was a recording or actual musician playing. I was determined to make sure I was at the Water's Edge the following Tuesday when JenPaul returned with his faithful companion- his steamy saxophone.....

..... And last night was the night.... I met JeanPaul, enjoyed dinner, sunset and another evening of captivating tunes from a musical master.

Just another great evening on the happy island of Aruba." □



"Holiday Greetings from Merry Aruba to all our Friends back in Massachusetts especially our friends from Revere, Massachusetts(a bit of nostalgia)".

Donny Feldman(Lynnfield, Mass) and Ron Rubin(Swampscott, Mass)
Formerly Revere, Massachusetts and friends forever

COVID-19 Status on Aruba

ORANJESTAD – Rules and protocols are being reviewed and evaluated on a daily basis and adapted as per current situation by a crisis team, in order to protect each and every one visiting and residing our island.

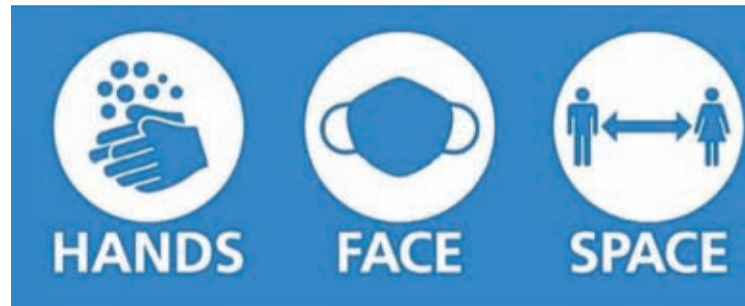
talized in Aruba but luckily none in the ICU. Due to lack of staff at the hospital they have to send patients over to Colombia for treatment. There are currently 3 persons at the ICU in Colombia.

Covid Status:

There are currently 2.109 active cases. 1.574 are residents and 535 non-residents. 181 deceased. There are 8 persons hospi-

Vaccination Status:

A total of 84,191 of the total population has been vaccinated of which 78,627 persons received both shots of the vaccine and 5,564 received only



the first shot. Children as young as 12 years are being vaccinated. For the senior population of 60 years and older a total of 21,794 received both shots and 995 received only the first shot. Aruba is administering booster shots to persons 55 and older

as of December 30, 2021

- Curfew: NO Curfew
- Closing Time: 12:00 am for all business for the exception of Casino's which can stay open till 1:00 am
- Restaurants: Max. 6 people per table.
- Social Activities and Sports: Max. people: 60 indoors, 75 outdoors.

The measures are as follows

- Funerals: Max. people: 75 (if the space is adequately large enough)
- Area Ban 7:00 pm - 5:00 am
- Nightlife: Dancing is not permitted
- Entertainment: Max 5 musicians on stage.
- Gathering Ban: Max. 6 people.
- Shopping: 1 person per family

** Businesses are allowed to lit their pagara until 12:00pm on December 31, 2021.

** Nightlife will be able to stay open until 1:00am on New Year's day instead of 12:00 am.

The following measures remain applicable:

- Masks: Use of masks is mandatory inside at all establishments.
- Alcohol: Ban of alcohol on public roads: 24 hours.
- Social Distancing: Continue maintaining social distance.☐

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Charities wade into NFT craze with mixed financial results

By **MICHAEL THEIS** of *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*

On GivingTuesday, officials at New Jersey-based health care charity Sostento learned they would receive a donation of roughly \$58,000 by the end of the week.

The donation was unlike any the nonprofit had received before. It was derived from the proceeds of the sale of a nonfungible token, or NFT, for a digital artwork called "The NFT Guild Philanthropist — Healthcare Heroes."

You've likely heard of NFTs. They're built on the same technology that underlies digital currencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum. These digital assets shot into the limelight in March 2021 after Mike Winkelmann, known by his artist moniker Beeple, auctioned off an NFT for \$69 million at Christie's. Think of an NFT as a deed or token associated with a work of digital art, like an image, an audio recording, or a video. That token can be used to keep track of the file's provenance and sale history, allowing someone to prove ownership of the asset.

While the technology was created to give artists more control over their work, NFTs have spawned a frenzy as collectors look to cash in. As that speculation intensifies, a growing number of charities have begun to explore fundraising efforts tied to NFTs. Although some NFT charity auctions have yielded eye-popping sums, others have had limited success. Complicating matters, NFTs use new technologies that are generating lots of questions for accountants and regulators. The "Guild Philanthropist" NFT sold for 6.3 Ethereum, the equivalent of roughly \$28,000. The artist provided a donation to match the sale price. For Sostento, accepting the donation was fairly simple. The organization worked with Giving Block, a nonprofit that helps other charities accept cryptocurrency, to convert the crypto into U.S. dollars. The NFT will also continue



Chimpanzee Cheetah paints artwork at the Save the Chimps sanctuary in Fort Pierce, Fla.
Associated Press

to benefit charities in the future. It was created with a provision that obliges proceeds of future sales to be given to charity.

But there is still a steep learning curve associated with NFTs and cryptocurrency, said Joe Agoada, CEO of Sostento, which develops software and communication products for the health care industry. Accountants advising Sostento cautioned against accepting NFTs and other cryptocurrency directly. Working with an intermediary to convert the NFT proceeds from ones and zeros to dollars and cents was crucial.

"It took a long time to understand how we could actually make this possible," said Agoada.

Sostento wasn't the only group to see a windfall from these novel tokens last week. Officials at Giving Block said they helped process roughly \$1 million in charitable donations on GivingTuesday derived from the proceeds of NFT auctions. And on Dec. 7, Giving Block will launch the inaugural NFTuesday, a day focused on driving more NFT-derived philanthropy.

Some nonprofits have entered the NFT fray as a way to reach a broader audience.

In July, officials at Save the Chimps, a chimpanzee refuge in Fort Pierce, Florida, scanned finger paintings done by three of its residents: Cheetah, Clay, and Tootie. From those scans, they created a series of NFTs and listed them for auction on Truesy, an NFT marketplace. Think of them like prints of a photograph. They were priced to sell at a value equivalent to about \$25. Save the Chimps set up its NFT to provide a royalty to the charity in the event of future sales. The fundraising haul so far? Just a few hundred dollars.

"The exciting part was they were all first-time donors," said Sara Halpert, the group's marketing director. That's the appeal for many charities that have started to dabble in the world of NFTs and, more broadly, cryptocurrency. These collectors and investors could be a valuable new audience for fundraisers to tap, said Pat Duffy, CEO of Giving Block. They tend to be richer-than-average, financially savvy younger donors who are very active online. "These are people a major-gifts officer should be connecting with and talking to," said Duffy.

It's less common for donors to give NFTs directly to nonprofits, but that's happening, too.

Earlier this year, entrepreneur Eduardo Burillo donated an NFT titled "CryptoPunk 5293" to the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami. The work, which is part of a 10,000-piece series, depicts the pixelated avatar of a person sporting a short-bob haircut, pink lipstick, and a Mona-Lisa-like expression. As of Thanksgiving, the average sale price of a CryptoPunk was just under \$500,000.

While NFTs may seem novel as an instrument of philanthropy, the assets tied to the tokens are similar to other forms of ephemeral art, such as performance art, video art, or art installations, said Alex Gartenfeld, artistic director at ICA Miami.

ICA Miami's case is unique, at least so far. No other museums have yet accepted NFTs into their collections. The biggest challenge for nonprofits — especially those that wish to hold an NFT as an asset — is that the existing accounting rules don't really address NFTs, says Brian Mittendorf, a professor of accounting at Ohio State University who focuses on nonprofits. The NFT is technically different from the artwork itself, which raises heady questions about what is and is not being valued, or even what could be considered

part of a museum's collection. "It captures both the challenges of charities dabbling in the cryptocurrency realm coupled with the challenges of charities seeking to raise funds off of things that are hard to value," Mittendorf said. "There are just open questions from an accounting standpoint."

Regulators, including the Securities and Exchange Commission, are beginning to examine how and when to treat NFTs as collectibles or securities. The eventual result of those decisions could have ramifications for charitable-accounting offices.

Charities are also experimenting with NFT-based fundraising in ways that go beyond the realm of digital art.

Environmental group Beneath the Waves, which focuses on ocean conservation, is auctioning off dozens of NFTs that each represent a real-life shark tag, with starting prices ranging from \$500 to \$20,000. The owners get the right to name their tagged shark and will receive updates on its movement through the oceans. One of the NFTs entitles the owner to take part in the group's marine-research efforts in the Caribbean. Bidding closed at \$23,000.

Rewilder.xyz, a new organization, is using NFT auctions to raise funds to buy land for reforestation efforts in the Amazon. For each donor who gives a minimum donation of 1 Ethereum, equivalent to approximately \$4,400, the group will create an NFT entitling the owner to receive periodic updates about the land they have helped purchase. So far, the effort has raised nearly 60 Ethereum, equivalent to roughly \$241,700 as of this writing.

"You basically buy a photo of the land," said Robbie Heeger, CEO of Endowment, a charity that sponsors donor-advised funds built on the Ethereum blockchain and helps other organizations accept crypto gifts. Endowment helped Rewilder establish the campaign. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 40 Famed fur tycoon
 - 1 Fire remnants
 - 6 Coffee additive
 - 11 Tea cake close to
 - 12 Banded rock
 - 13 The Nina and the Pinta, e.g.
 - 15 Toward the stern
 - 16 — Moines
 - 17 Maiden name label
 - 18 Renegade, perhaps
 - 20 Summer cooler
 - 21 Was a pioneer
 - 22 Ventilation conduit
 - 23 Fancy tie
 - 26 Hay bundles
 - 27 Campus area
 - 28 Knight's address
 - 29 Ornate vase
 - 30 Parvenu
 - 34 "I — Rock"
 - 35 Take to court
 - 36 Tell tales
 - 37 James Hilton title character
- DOWN**
- 1 Region of northern India
 - 2 Verne specialty
 - 3 Party VIPs
 - 4 Tolkien tree herder
 - 5 Tiny start
 - 6 Pert
 - 7 "Gross!"
 - 8 Lucrative
 - 9 Content
 - 10 Bristles at
 - 14 Enjoy a novel
 - 19 Proceed slowly
 - 22 Pub
 - 23 Superhero from Atlantis
 - 24 Conjecture
 - 25 Two-deck game
 - 26 Cuts in two
 - 28 Goad on
 - 30 Manual readers
 - 31 Suspect's story
 - 32 Turn red, maybe
 - 33 Irritable
 - 38 Craggy hill
 - 39 Femur's upper end

B	O	S	S	A	S	O	W	S
A	X	I	O	M	E	U	R	O
S	I	M	B	A	T	R	I	L
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A	R	I	A	P	E	A		
M	I	D	D	L	E	C	L	A
P	O	T	E	G	O	L	I	P
E	L	I	Z	A	R	H	O	N
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Yesterday's answer

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11						12				
13					14					
15			16					17		
18			19					20		
			21					22		
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27					28					
29				30				31	32	33
34				35				36		
37			38					39		
40						41				
42						43				

A X Y D L B A A X R
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

11-30

CRYPTOQUOTE

XGD LDOFYUD NQ FYXDSRXCS
YULYORXDT XGD LDOFYUD NQ
R URXYNU; XGD XJN HDDZ
ZROD YU XGDYS LNJUJRS
XDULDVOV. — INGRUC
JNFQBRUB MNU BNDXGD

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW BADLY YOU PAINT SO LONG AS YOU DON'T PAINT BADLY LIKE OTHER PEOPLE. — GEORGE MOORE



Dr. Anthony Fauci, White House Chief Medical Advisor and Director of the NIAID and Dr. Rochelle Walensky, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, arrive to participate in the White House COVID-19 Response Team's regular call with the National Governors Association in the South Court Auditorium in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House Campus, Monday, Dec. 27, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press

The AP Interview: CDC chief says omicron mostly mild so far

By MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — More than 40 people in the U.S. have been found to be infected with the omicron variant so far, and more than three-quarters of them had been vaccinated, the chief of the CDC said Wednesday. But she said nearly all of them were only mildly ill. In an interview with The Associated Press, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the data is very limited and the agency is working on a more detailed analysis of what the new mutant form of the coronavirus might hold for the U.S.

"What we generally know is the more mutations a variant has, the higher level you need your immunity to be. ... We want to make sure we bolster everybody's immunity. And that's really what motivated the decision to expand our guidance," Walensky

said, referencing the recent approval of boosters for all adults.

She said "the disease is mild" in almost all of the cases seen so far, with reported symptoms mainly cough, congestion and fatigue.

One person was hospitalized, but no deaths have been reported, CDC officials said.

Some cases can become increasingly severe as days and weeks pass, and Walensky noted that the data is a very early, first glimpse of U.S. omicron infections.

The earliest onset of symptoms of any of the first 40 or so cases was Nov. 15, according to the CDC.

The omicron variant was first identified in South Africa last month and has since been reported in 57 countries, according to the World Health Organization. The first U.S. case was reported on Dec. 1. As of Wednesday afternoon, the

CDC had recorded 43 cases in 19 states. Most were young adults. About a third of those patients had traveled internationally.

More than three-quarters of those patients had been vaccinated, and a third had boosters, Walensky said. Boosters take about two weeks to reach full effect, and some of the patients had received their most recent shot within that period, CDC officials said.

Fewer than 1% of the U.S. COVID-19 cases genetically sequenced last week were the omicron variant; the delta variant accounted for more than 99%.

Scientists are trying to better understand how easily it spreads. British officials said Wednesday that they think the omicron variant could become the dominant version of the coronavirus in the United Kingdom in as soon as a month. □

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The AP Interview: Nikole Hannah-Jones' warning on democracy

By AARON MORRISON

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Following a year of professional milestones born of her work on America's history of slavery, Pulitzer Prize-winning Black journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones said she is clear-eyed about her mission to force a reckoning around the nation's self-image.

The New York Times Magazine writer began this year in a protracted tenure fight with her alma mater in North Carolina — the dispute ended when she announced in July that she'd take her talents to a historically Black university — and is closing it as a national best-selling author.

"I've gone from being just a journalist to becoming some sort of symbol for people who either love me and my work or revile me and my work," she said.

Hannah-Jones recently spoke to The Associated Press in an exclusive interview about the ongoing controversy over The 1619 Project, a groundbreaking collection of essays on race that first appeared in a special issue of The New

York Times Magazine in 2019. Now in book form, the project has become a touchstone for America's reckoning over slavery and the reverberations for Black Americans.

"The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story," and "Born on the Water," a picture storybook collaboration with co-writer Renée Watson and illustrator Nikkolas Smith, each have spent consecutive weeks atop the Times bestseller list since their Nov. 16 release. A TV documentary on the work is due out later in 2022.

Still, Hannah-Jones said the backlash to her work is evidence that the U.S. is approaching a make-or-break crossroads on its global standing as a democracy.

"I think that we are in a very frightening time," she said in the interview at AP's New York City headquarters.

"People who are much, much smarter than me, who have studied this much, much longer than I have are ringing the alarm," Hannah-Jones said. "I think we have to ask ourselves ... the narrators, the

storytellers, the journalists: Are we ringing the alarm in the right way? Are we doing our jobs to try to uphold our democracy?"

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

AP: If anything, what did this year teach you about where we are in our country currently, when it comes to racial justice and our reckoning with history?

HANNAH-JONES: This year, to me, is just reflective of what I've always understood about this country. And that is that steps forward, steps towards racial progress, are always met with an intensive backlash. That we are a society that willfully does not want to deal with the anti-Blackness that is at the core of so many of our institutions and really our society itself.

AP: Can you point to any progress in how the discourse has developed or evolved?

HANNAH-JONES: Certainly the fact that very powerful people are so concerned about a work of journalism called The 1619 Project that they would seek to discredit it, that they would seek to

seek to ban it from being taught, does speak to the fact that there are millions of Americans who want a more honest accounting of our history, who want to better understand the country that we're in, who are open to new narratives.

AP: Do you think this country is poised to make any progress on issues of racial justice, and especially around education?

HANNAH-JONES: Many in mainstream media got caught up in the Republican propaganda campaign, which tried to conflate the teaching of a more accurate history, the teaching of structural racism, with trying to make white children feel badly about themselves or guilty. And so much of the coverage was driven by that. ... I hope that there's going to be some serious examination of the role that we as media played (in) really putting forth and legitimizing what was a propaganda campaign.

AP: The 1619 Project is now a book. For people who don't understand, how is

it different from what was published in The New York Times Magazine?

HANNAH-JONES: We all know that there has been a tremendous amount of scrutiny of the 1619 Project. ... I think those who had questions can now go and actually see the source material, can see the historiography that undergirds the work. For anyone who comes to it with an open mind, it is going to be deeply surprising. They're going to learn so much about both the history of their country, but also the history that shapes so much of modern American life.

AP: Some people would say that this is all an agenda-driven piece of work.

HANNAH-JONES: And they'd be right.

AP: Why are they right?

HANNAH-JONES: Because it is. The agenda is to force a reckoning with who we are as a country. The agenda is to take the story of Black Americans in slavery, from being an asterisk to being marginal to being central to how we understand our country. When people say that, though, I know that they're saying it in disparaging ways. I'm just being honest about the nature of this work. ... We've been taught the history of a country that does not exist. We've been taught the history of a country that renders us incapable of understanding how we get an insurrection in the greatest democracy on Jan. 6.

AP: What issues do you see as dominating our politics in 2022?

HANNAH-JONES: I try to never predict the future. And I'm also not a political reporter. ... We, as Americans, are going to be severely tested in the next year or two to decide, what are we willing to sacrifice to be the country that we believe that we are? And whose rights do we hold as fundamental in this country? And are all Americans worthy of having those same rights? I don't think we know the answer to that. But I think what is important for us to know is what we decide. □



Journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones poses for a portrait at the headquarters of The Associated Press in New York, Friday, Dec. 10, 2021. Associated Press

Candace Parker voted AP Female Athlete of Year for 2nd time

By **DOUG FEINBERG**
AP Basketball Writer

Candace Parker wrestled with the decision to make a huge change in her life and leave Los Angeles — where she had played her entire WNBA career — and head home to Chicago. In the end, the appeal of a homecoming was too much for Parker to ignore, and it couldn't have worked out better.

The 35-year-old Parker staved off Father Time to help the Chicago Sky win the franchise's first WNBA championship and capped off 2021 by being named The Associated Press' Female Athlete of the Year for a second time. "There was something about going to where you started playing the game," Parker said in a phone interview. "It's exciting to play in front of the people who first saw me pick up a basketball. To win at home, I'm just now recognizing it a little bit. How special that really is. Something that is top on my list."

It's a list that keeps the working mom and basketball analyst for TNT pretty busy. Parker is finally beginning to appreciate bringing a title to her hometown in the twilight of her career. As the final seconds ticked off the clock in the WNBA Finals, Parker sprinted to the corner of the court where she hugged family and friends, celebrat-



Chicago Sky center Candace Parker (3) moves the ball during the first half of Game 2 of basketball's WNBA Finals against the Phoenix Mercury, Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2021, in Phoenix.

Associated Press

ing becoming one of the rare elite athletes to return home and win a championship. It was a long shot ending not many saw coming when Parker made the move. Winning it all seemed an even more remote possibility at the start of the WNBA season when the Sky lost seven of their first nine games. Parker was sidelined with an ankle injury, but when she returned, Chicago started winning and earned a No. 6 seed in the playoffs.

"I'm really thankful for those who made my journey and the people who supported me making it as smooth as possible. My daughter, my wife, my immediate family,

we rolled with it. We wanted it," she said. "Things are going to get hard, but stick with it."

It is an approach to life that made Parker second-guess her decision.

Parker was concerned that she would be viewed as a quitter by leaving Los Angeles. This despite being named the AP award winner her rookie year with the Sparks in 2008, when she was honored as the WNBA's MVP and top rookie. She also guided the Sparks to the championship in 2016 and is one of 14 players to have won a college, WNBA and Olympic title. She played college ball at Tennessee, where she won

two titles.

"I'm a big believer when you start something you finish it. When you say something, you do it. I'm not perfect, as I do say stuff and don't follow through," said Parker, a two-time Olympic gold medalist. "My parents taught me don't quit. I wanted to finish my career in LA, but I also finished my contract, I committed to that amount of time. I didn't ask to be traded. The better opportunity for me and my family was to go back home."

The 13 years since her first AP athlete of the year honors ties Parker with Babe Didrikson Zaharias for the longest time between win-

ning in the 80-year history of the award. The award was voted on by a panel of sports editors. Parker received 11 first-place votes, edging out swimmer Katie Ledecky and gymnast Simone Biles.

"You couldn't write a better story than the one of Candace Parker bringing the WNBA championship to her hometown in her first season with the Chicago Sky," WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said. "On top of her accomplishments on the court and in the studio, she has continued to be a leader and role model to many, including working moms around the world. The WNBA is proud to have players like Candace who continually raise the bar and elevate the game and our league to the highest level."

Parker is the only WNBA player to win the AP Female Athlete of the Year award. She hopes that changes soon as the league continues to get more national exposure.

"The more visibility we get as a league, which seems like it is coming, the more we'll see," Parker said. "If you see it, see ... more and more talented players ... that are capable and deserving. This next wave of athletes that are able to have their career followed from the time it starts till the end are going to change the face of the WNBA." □

Packers, Chiefs maintain top 2 spots in AP Pro32 poll

By **SIMMI BUTTAR**
AP Pro Football Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Aaron Rodgers has lifted the Green Bay Packers to the NFL's best record.

Two wins away from securing home-field advantage in the NFC playoffs, the Packers maintained their hold on the top spot for the latest AP Pro32 poll.

The Packers earned 10 of the 12 first-place votes for 382 points in balloting Tuesday by media members who regularly cover the NFL.

The Packers are No. 1 in the poll for the third consecutive week. They host the division rival Minnesota Vikings on Sunday night.

"The Packers held off a stubborn Browns team at home, a second straight week where they nearly blew a comfortable lead," Newsday's Bob Glauber said.

"A warning sign of future issues? Let's just call it something to keep an eye on. Aaron Rodgers & Co. are still in control of the top seed in the NFC."

The AFC West champion Kansas City Chiefs, who have won eight in a row, earned the remaining two first-place votes and remained at No. 2.

"Most complete team right now, and (quarterback Patrick) Mahomes has led them to eight straight wins," Fox Sports' John Czarnecki said.

The Chiefs will look to extend their winning streak to nine as they head to Cincinnati to take on the Bengals, who moved up four spots to No. 9 in the poll.



Green Bay Packers' Aaron Rodgers throws his 443rd career touchdown pass, during the first half of an NFL football game against the Cleveland Browns Saturday, Dec. 25, 2021, in Green Bay, Wis.

Associated Press

The NFC East champion Dallas Cowboys, who dominated Washington on Sunday night, gained two spots to move to No. 3.

The NFC South champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers slipped a spot to No. 4 despite routing Carolina on Sunday. □

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SAVE \$2.29

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\$6.85

U.S. Procureur Filet Steaks

Per KG



SAVE \$2.61

\$3.99

BBQ/Grill Chicken Wings Hot

Per KG



SAVE \$0.29

\$1.31

Oven Roasted White Turkey Breast

100 GR



\$0.79

Shoulder Ham Espina

100 GR



SAVE \$0.29

\$0.97

Colby Jack Cheese

100 GR



SAVE \$0.57

\$1.71

Cabbage Green USA

Per KG



\$3.42

Peppers Green

Per KG



SAVE \$0.80

\$3.25

Lamb Weston Ziggy Fries

750gr



SAVE \$0.74

\$2.28

Sunny D & Tangy Original 64oz

Each



SAVE \$2.28

\$3.08

Hawaiian Punch Fruit Juicy Red 128oz

Each



SAVE \$0.34

\$2.28

Bon Appetit Banana Nut Muffin 5.5oz

Each



SAVE \$0.57

\$3.14

Danesita Danish Cookies

Each



SAVE \$0.57

\$2.57

Toufayan Mini Bagels Whole Wheat 18oz

Each



SAVE \$0.57

\$0.26

Petit Pain Bruin (Pistolet)

Each



SAVE \$1.12

\$2.85

Birds Eye Mini Corn Cob 6ct

Each



SAVE \$0.32

\$1.54

Red Bull Energy Drink 8.4oz

Each



NEW YEAR SPECIALS

\$33.11

Johnnie Walker Red Label 1L

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NEW YEAR SPECIALS

\$19.42

Morrison Black Label Blend Whiskey 1L

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NEW YEAR SPECIALS

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Each